

[TEXT] Deathworld Cooking

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DEATHWORLD COOKING

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Humans, hm?

You've probably heard a great deal about them already. How they're the first known sentient species to evolve on a death world. How they can rip a Thuxian broodwarrior limb from limb with their bare claws. Well, first, I've met a human who actually got into a fight with a Thuxian... well, he didn't call it a fight. Some other word that begins with the human letter 'F', and he tells me the Thuxian was stronger than him.

Secondly, let me tell you about their food.

You see, on a death world, everything is trying to kill you. That's the whole point. The predators are trying to kill the prey, yes, but the prey are also trying to kill the predators with evolved bio-toxins, and the plants are trying to kill the herbivores with autogenerated nerve agents and razor-sharp spines. So consider this:

What kind of cooking would you get from a world like that? Where even the food is trying to destroy you from the inside out?

I had the privilege of being on a diplomatic mission to the human homeworld, and by some cosmic fortune, the human digestive system is not all that different from my own. We both need proteins, lipids, and glucoses, with about the same body water content. We even have roughly the same olfactory senses.

When the human diplomat caught wind of this, he decided to arrange 'a special treat'. He called in some 'gormey sheffs' (apparently highly skilled food preparers) from all over the planet to be the first to prepare food (which the humans call 'cooking') for a Kroozti.

It was a night I will never forget.

There was a table, it might have been 40 dunars long... if I stood on it and walk from end to end it would have taken me a hundred steps. And it was covered with a thousand different foods made of everything you could imagine, and many, many more things you couldn't. Everything on it made my mandibles quiver with anticipation.

And the smell. Gods in the Twilight, I almost passed out, and my adjutant did. It was like... no, I don't even have words. Just imagine that feeling you get, right after procreation, and then try to think of a smell that could cause that. There were hundreds of such smells, all through the room.

Tentatively, I picked up what I suspected was a piece of fire-cleaned meat. It did not smell like meat – it smelled more like the fire it was cooked in. A smell of smoke and flame.

I will remember tasting it for the rest of my life. Again, I have no words in Krootzi or any other language I know. Telling you how it tasted would be like trying to explain sight to a creature without eyes. All I can say is that it was delicious beyond measure.

And it burned. Like my mandibles were on fire. I thought for a moment I'd been poisoned! Evidently one of the humans noticed my distress, and handed me a glass of an opaque fluid which I came to understand is called 'milk'. It made the pain fade instantly. I asked him how this substance was made, but the question seemed to make him uncomfortable, so instead he explained the mysterious fire-meat. He said it was actually the meat of an avian creature native to the forests of their planet, and that the pain was caused by a thing they called 'spices'.

Spices. This is where it gets strange. Remember what I asked you about death worlds? Well, consider that a species that evolves on a death world doesn't consider it dangerous. They find it normal, and the rest of the galaxy tame by comparison. Well, the same is true of their food. Humans find normal food... boring. So they find various herbs and vegetables with those neurotoxins I told you about, and they mix them in – deliberately mix in poison – with their other food.

The poison I had been subjected to? Capsaicin. Yes, the same stuff Thormons use as a chemical weapon. It's banned in thirty-four systems as a chemical weapon, and humans eat it. And it just gets stranger.

They had a foodstuff that... the comparison does it no justice, but it looked like a pile of worms. Thin, white worms drenched in a thick sauce. The human I was with bade me to eat it, and with some trepidation, I did.

Again, my ability to express the sensations fails me. There was a bit of that firey feeling, like before, but at the same time an unbelievable... humans call it 'richness'. I think it's a loose approximation for fat content, but one serving of that delicious stuff and I could FEEL my arteries clogging.

And it went on and on for hours. I thought my abdomen would explode by the time it was done.

The thing is, humans, like any other species, crave pleasure in their lives. But their homeworld has made them tough and thick, hard to damage. At the same time, it has made them hard to please as well. And in their quest to sate their hunger, they have crafted the greatest cornucopia the galaxy has ever seen.

Just know this. The next time you hear the words 'human' and 'buffet' in a sentence, get ready for a wild ride.